

## Sermon for Proper 25

### The Text: Mark 10:46-52

Today in the Gospel reading we are introduced to a certain beggar named Bartimaeus. It is a very simple story on one level; it seems like just another brief healing that Jesus does on his way from Jericho to Jerusalem. When compared to his Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem, should we consider this account anything more than a “blip” along the way? But actually, Jesus uses this healing to achieve two purposes. Firstly, to heal Bartimaeus, making him a follower of Jesus, and secondly, to teach James and John a thing or two about arrogance and blindness.

The reader of Mark’s Gospel knows of James’ and John’s act of pride. Just before this healing story they tell Jesus that they want to sit either side of him in glory in heaven. The cheek of it all, and the arrogance! They are puffed up, spiritually blind in seeing what it is to be a follower of Jesus.

So when they see Bartimaeus—this beggar on the roadside—James and John (we assume) are probably some of the ones who try to silence this unclean nuisance of a man from their glory trip into Jerusalem. Beggars in Jewish society were considered unclean, dirty and to be avoided. In original Hebrew, Bar-timaeus means ‘son of the unclean.’ But there’s a twist! In Greek his name means ‘son of honour, respect and reverence.’

Jesus sees Bartimaeus according to his true value and identity as a loved child of God. Conversely, the disciples and some of the crowd see him as the lowest of the low. Though Bartimaeus is unable to physically see, he can spiritually see that Jesus, as God’s Son, is passing by. The disciples are simply still blind in seeing who Jesus came to save and heal. And so the disciples then watch and see just how much Jesus loves this beggar. Jesus heals him totally and lets him see light once again.

Bartimaeus then flings away his outer garment, the garment he would lay out to collect money, and keep him warm at night. He doesn’t need it

anymore, because he can see that Jesus is all he needs; he now has a family to belong to. He belongs! He is no longer an outsider!

In the original Greek language, to be blind has a second meaning. It means to be 'smoky, puffed up with the fumes of arrogance'. Smoke gets in your eyes and clouds your vision so you can't see properly. Actually, James and John are a bit smoky themselves! This whole scene is quite shocking as Jesus' disciples and the crowd are clearly too puffed up with self-importance and desire to enter Jerusalem with glory, rather than stop and bother with an annoying beggar.

We can remember Bartimaeus as he who threw off his outer garment. The author of the Book of Hebrews would later say this about throwing off: 'Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith' (Heb 12:1-2a). This section of Hebrews is practically a commentary on Bartimaeus' healing of sight and subsequent following of Jesus. St Paul would add that we do not just "throw off" but also "put on." Paul said, "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ' (Galatians 3:26-27).

Of you are baptized, then you have the wonderful clothing of Jesus – his robes of righteousness upon you. As you go away with today, imagine that white clothing to be placed over people you personally struggle with, or don't ever associate with. We can easily see many people as unclean beggars. How many times have we been guilty of being physically put off from ministering to them? Have we been too busy and too puffed up to care because of our busy schedule and important things to do.

On Reformation Sunday we remember the time the church became puffed up and blind and lost the Gospel. Martin Luther was key to removing the garment of blindness and revealing to the people the robe of Baptism and righteousness in Christ that they always had. Just like the past, sometimes the detailed and administrative business of doing church today can get a bit smoky. We can get puffed up with pride and self-

importance and are blind with smoke in our eyes to the needs of real people who need Jesus.

Jesus calls and sends you to get out of your comfort zone and reach out to the homeless, to refugees, or the disabled, or mentally ill or anyone who doesn't quite fit the bill of a comfortable predictable church. We may all have a heart for that, but practically it is not always easy.

But Jesus helps us and does the leading. We need to follow him along the way like Bartimaeus, casting off our smoky garments of self-righteousness, and putting on the white royal baptismal robes of adoption into God's family. It is in those robes we are forgiven and cleansed through the Holy Spirit. Amen.